

- Public—Private partnership is encouraged in the development/ strengthening of agricultural marketing infrastructure, grading and standardization.
- Reorientation of banks towards extending credit, especially production credit, to rural and farmer households at concessional rate of interests.
- Contract farming to attract corporate investors.
- Revitalization of agricultural research to ensure full exploitation of scientific advances for improving productivity according to agro-climatic conditions.
- Revitalization of agricultural extension system through Krishi Vikas Kendras in each district and making extension system farmer friendly by way of autonomous institutional arrangements for technological dissemination in the form of "Agricultural Technology Management Agency" (ATMA) at district level.
- Setting up of National Rainfed Area Authority has been approved to deal with the problems faced by rainfed areas.

Strengthening PDS

*252. PROF. P.J. KURIEN: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Public Distribution System has weakened over the years;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of the steps Government propose to strengthen PDS and to distribute all essential commodities through PDS?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (c) No, Sir. The increasing trend of offtake of foodgrains year after year shows the improvement in the performance of Public Distribution System in the country:

(Lakh tonnes)				
All India basis	Offtake of foodgrains (year-wise)			
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07 (upto 9/06)
	239.31	293.55	311.05	150.45

The strengthening of the Targeted Public Distribution System to improve its efficiency, accountability and effectiveness is an ongoing process. The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) is operated under the joint responsibility of the Central and the State Governments wherein the Central Government is responsible for procurement of foodgrains, storage and their transportation upto the Principal Distribution Centers of FCI and the State Governments are responsible for identification of beneficiaries, issue them ration cards and distribute foodgrains through a vast net work of 4.86 lakh Fair Price Shops scattered all over the country. In such a vast net work chances of irregularities can not be ruled out. However, whenever a complaint is received by the Central Government it is forwarded to the concerned State Governments/UTs for investigations and necessary remedial action.

To discuss the issue of diversion/leakages and strengthening of TPDS, five Regional Conferences of State Food Ministers/State Food Secretaries were held. Subsequently a National level Conference of State Food Ministers/State Food Secretaries under the Chairmanship of the Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution was held on 29.03.2006. On the basis of the discussions, this Department has drawn a Action Plan and sent to all State Governments for taking necessary action thereon. The Action Plan contains the following points:

1. States should undertake a campaign for Review of BPL/AAY lists, to eliminate ghost ration cards.
2. Strict action should be taken against the guilty to ensure leakage free distribution of foodgrains. In this respect information asked for under clause 8 & 9 of PDS Control Order, may also be sent.
3. For sake of transparency involvement of elected PRI members in distribution of foodgrains be ensured. As far as possible, FPS licences be given to SHGs, Gram Panchayats, cooperatives, etc.
4. BPL/AAY lists should be displayed on all FPSs.
5. District-wise and FPS-wise allocation of foodgrains should be put up on websites and other prominent places, for public scrutiny.
6. Wherever possible, door step delivery of foodgrains should be ensured by States, instead of letting private transporters/wholesalers to transport goods.

7. Timely availability of foodgrains at FPS level and fixed dates of distribution to ration card holders should be ensured.
8. Training of members of FPS level Vigilance Committees should be ensured. Proposals for funding training can be sent to the GoI.
9. Computerisation of TPDS operations be undertaken.

In addition, the Government has also taken steps for introducing electronic transfer of funds to FCI and issued instructions for display of Banners/Boards on the wind shield as well as rear end of the truck/vehicles carrying PDS articles indicating name of State Government, destination, commodity and Agent's name.

At present wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene are distributed under TPDS. However, to make the Fair Price Shops more viable the Central Government have requested the States/UTs Administrations to allow the Fair Price Shops to sell non PDS commodities and additional items of daily use. There is no proposal to bear any subsidy on this account by the Central Government. Central Government is already bearing a huge subsidy on distribution of rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene oil under the PDS.

Garib Rath

†*253. SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of trains introduced as 'Garib Rath' alongwith the cities linked by the said trains;

(b) the number of poor passengers travelled therein, till date;

(c) the income earned by the Railways through these poor passengers; and

(d) the amount spent indiscriminately on the advertisement of these 'Garib Rath' trains in newspapers by Government?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI LALU PRASAD): (a) 2203/2204 Saharsa-Amritsar Garib Rath (Bi-weekly) Express has been introduced between Saharsa and Amritsar connecting Beas, Jalandhar city, Ludhiana,

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.